

Masonic Temple (also called  
Masonic Hall, now Julius  
Lansburgh Furniture Co., Inc.)  
Northwest corner of F and 9th  
Streets, N.W.  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-218

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
801 19th St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

MASONIC TEMPLE  
(also called MASONIC HALL, now JULIUS  
LANSBURGH FURNITURE CO., INC.)

Location: Northwest corner of F and Ninth Streets, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Arron and Lillie Straus  
3002 Druid Park Drive  
Baltimore, Maryland

Present Occupant: Julius Lansburgh Furniture Co., Inc.

Present Use: Retail Furniture store.

Brief Statement  
of Significance: A post-Civil War fraternal and commercial building  
whose cornerstone-laying was honored by the presence  
of the President of the United States. This structure  
ranks among the most distinguished works of archi-  
tecture in Washington and is an important visual  
landmark.

PAR I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Deed RMH No. 5-27  
rec. Oct 28, 1865 shows that on May 15, 1865 Gonzaga  
College deeded to the Masonic Hall Association lots  
#1 and #2 in sq. 376.

Building constructed 1868-1870.

Lease and agreement [4536-494 rec. July 29, 1921]  
made by the Masonic Hall Association with Julius  
Lansburgh Furniture Co., Inc. 5 year lease with  
option to extend 5 years and option to purchase during  
first 5 years.

The Masonic Hall Association deeded to Julius Lansburgh  
Furniture Co., Inc. on July 15, 1926 [rec. July 16, 1926  
5800-239].

The property was deeded in Deed 10397-199 rec. April 1,  
1955 on March 31, 1955 to Arron Straus & Lillie Straus  
Foundation, Inc. by the Lansburgh Realty Corp.

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2. Date of erection: 1868-1870; dedicated May 20, 1870.
3. Architect: Cluss and Kammeraub.
4. Original plan and construction of building: The cost was about \$200,000. A wood engraving published in 1884 [Joseph West Moore, Picturesque Washington (Providence: J. A. and R. A. Reid, 1884), p. 183] shows the south and east fronts of this building to be substantially unchanged except on the ground floor, where there were two entrances on the south, in the second bay from each end. Each had a semicircular-arched opening between engaged columns which carried a small portion of an entablature. In each bay flanking these entrances there was a triply-divided store window with transom. A similar window occupied the two-bay area at the center of the south facade, flanked by rustication. Pilaster strips at the corners were similarly rusticated. The east facade contained similar store windows at the end bays and a rusticated pier at the central bay.

According to an atlas [Sanborn's Atlas (New York: Sanborn, 1888)] the Masonic lodge rooms were on the third and fourth floors. The entrance and stairway were at the sixth and seventh bays from the east end, on F Street. The ground floor was occupied by stores.

It is to be inferred that the second floor was occupied in large part by a public hall; the ceiling height was appropriate and such halls were common at the time. William Forsyth's Map of Washington, 1870, gives the name as "Masonic Hall." (This is the space now taken up by the second and third stories, an additional floor having been inserted later.)

5. Alterations and additions: The present third floor was inserted and other alterations made c. 1921, to convert the building into a large retail store.
- B. Historical events and persons associated with structure: The cornerstone was laid May 30, 1868, by B. B. French, Grand Master. "Andrew Johnson, then President of the United States, not only taking part in the ceremonies, but marching in the procession over the entire route..." [Wm. B. Webb, J. Wooldridge, et al., The Centennial History of Washington, D.C. (Dayton, O.: United Brethren Publishing House, 1892), p. 704.]

C. Sources of Information:

Primary and unpublished sources: Photograph in the Brady Handy Collection of the Library of Congress; Ninth and F Streets looking west. This shows much of the F-Street facade, in pre-automobile days, in its relation to other buildings on F Street.

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Photograph, Panorama of Washington viewed from the tower of the Smithsonian Institution in 1875, in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. The upper stories of the F-Street front can be seen in relation to the whole area.

Files of National Capital Planning Commission.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: A post-Civil War fraternal and commercial building, large in scale, dignified and restrained in character, its composition and details following palatial models of the Italian Renaissance and seventeenth century; this structure, despite virtually complete remodeling on the interior and re-facing of the first story on the exterior, continues to be among the best pieces of architecture in the city--not excepting the United States Government buildings--and a notable example of cast-iron incrustation.
2. Condition of fabric: Good, except for some deterioration of paint on the exterior, which has not apparently caused any damage to the facing material.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 131'5" X 51'6" plus rear wing 31'5" X 41'4"; main building, three by eight bays, four stories; shape--rectangular plus a rear ell.
2. Foundations: None visible on the exterior; some rubble and brick foundation walls appear inside the basement.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Walls are brick, those on the street fronts faced with cast-iron units in imitation of regular coursed stone. The iron surface, where visible, appears to have been coated with zinc or a similar metal of a light color (probably before

being installed). The paint is white or light gray in color, somewhat weathered but without any rust stains. The brick of the rear walls is now painted black.

4. Structural systems, framing: Exterior walls are load-bearing masonry: these are original. A small section of the first-floor framing is visible near the southwest corner; it contains wooden joists 3" X 15" and 4" X 15" spaced about 1'5" on centers; this appears original.

Interior supports vary. At the first story a row of seven columns supporting a girder, is located somewhat north of mid-span; this is joined by three more columns on axis with the ell. Two columns in a line parallel to the main row are located south of mid-span at the fifth bay from the east end.

At the second story there is a row of seven columns along the center of the main area joined by three columns on the axis of the ell; they support a floor which is not original, having been inserted to divide a high story into two stories. Girders span from the north to south walls, one above each column, two being above the sixth column from the east; there is a girder on axis of the ell.

At the third story there are three columns; two on axis of the main area at the west end, and one just north of them on the axis of the ell. There are no other interior supports, the floor above being carried by girders spanning from wall to wall. Framing at the fourth story is similar. At the fifth story there are but two columns, located on axis of the main area at the west end, which carry a girder two bays in length. It is possible that the columns on these upper stories represent an original framing system.

5. Design of Facades: The street fronts conform to a four-story astylar palace design, each story being marked by horizontal bands and the whole having a prominent cornice. The ground story (now covered by recent store windows and frieze) was treated as a basement. Corners are marked by pilaster strips and the central two bays of the south front form a pavilion of very slight projection. The corner pilasters once had capitals at the top story, but only an abacus remains. Above the second-story windows there is a wide paneled band; a comparable band is located just below the heads of the third-story windows, being interrupted by the openings. There is a moulded string course at the sill of the second-story windows, and a plain string course at the window sills of the top story.

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6. Openings:

Windows: Openings, which are now closed up, are rectangular and have architrave trim. Architraves of the second-story windows are paneled and once carried rosettes at intervals; only the holes where they were attached remain. Openings are crowned by pediments supported on consoles, segmental and triangular pediments alternating at the second story. Those of the third story are all segmental and those of the fourth story triangular, modified somewhat from the orthodox Renaissance type. An apron connects the fourth-story windows with the pediments of those on the third story.

At the head of each second-story window there is a frieze, containing at the center a female head in high relief, formerly flanked at each side by a garland, of which only traces remain. The same form is repeated without variation. The pediments of the upper stories once carried central finials, now lost.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof appears to be of very low pitch.
- b. Cornice: A three-part entablature crowns the street fronts, returning at the corners of the rear and side walls. The architrave consists of a fascia crowned by an ovolo and fillet. The frieze is wide and contains coupled console-brackets and panels of alternating design: (1) rectangular with narrow mouldings at the edge, containing a garland in high relief, and (2) shouldered at each corner, with a smaller inside panel rounded at both ends. Between the brackets forming each pair there is a narrow vertical moulded panel. At the top of the frieze there is a dentil course. The cornice, which appears to be wooden, projects substantially.

Above a narrow corona there are a small moulding and a cyma recta.

At the top of the north wall there is a projecting brick surface, corresponding to the width of the frieze on the street facades, carried on brick corbels; this also extends along the east wall of the ell.

8. Other ornamental work: At the center of the south facade on the fourth story, there is a rectangular moulded panel, which contains fragmentary symbolic ornament: a wide console bearing a cross, with traces of diagonally crossed motifs, apparently a sword or swords. From the console hangs a trowel.

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C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Each floor is now undivided, consisting of a L-shaped area with an elevator and stair at the north end of the smaller wing. A basement extends beneath the western part of the building and beneath the eastern half of the main area. Approximate ceiling heights: basement, 8 feet; first floor, 16 feet; second floor, 11 feet; third floor, 12 feet; fourth floor, 16 feet; fifth floor, 14 feet.
2. Stairways: The present stair is of iron or steel construction; it has a closed string and ornamental railing. The location or design of original stairs are not now evident.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior changes and renovations have left little or no trace of original finish. Wall surfaces are largely of painted plaster. All ceilings above the first story are covered with ornamental sheet metal, which is old but probably not original, of standard designs common toward the end of the nineteenth century. An egg-and-dart cornice on the second story stops at the window openings.
4. Mechanical equipment: The modern equipment does not indicate what systems or fixtures served earlier state of the building.

D. Site and surroundings:

General Setting: This building is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of F and Ninth Streets, N.W., across Ninth Street from the old U. S. Patent Office, in a predominantly commercial area. The site is level or nearly so. The building extends to the sidewalk, with no landscape treatment or accessory structures. Other buildings adjoin it toward the west. The area adjoining on the north side is an automobile parking lot.

Prepared by: Harley J. McKee, FAIA  
Architect  
National Park Service  
June 18, 1969

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

Addendum to  
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